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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 H-01 SAB-01 SS-14 SP-02 L-01 INR-05

PM-03 EB-03 /037 W
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R 061520Z FEB 76
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6641

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 PANAMA 0886

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PN
SUBJ: CONGRESSIONAL Q&A'S ON PANAMA VI: THE NATIONAL GUARD

FOR ARA/PAN - MINISTER BELL

THIS MESSAGE NUMBER 6 IN A SERIES OF PROPOSED Q&A'S FOR POSSIBLE USE IN CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY.

1. Q. HOW LARGE IS PANAMA'S NATIONAL GUARD?

A. JUST OVER 8000 OFFICERS AND MEN AT PRESENT.

2. Q. IS THIS NOT EXCESSIVE FOR A COUNTRY OF PANAMA'S SIZE? DOES THIS NOT INDICATE THE ESSENTIALLY MILITARY NATURE OF THE TORRIJOS REGIME?

A. NOT WHEN THE COMPOSITION AND PURPOSES OF THIS FORCE ARE ALSO CONSIDERED. IN ADDITION TO BEING PANAMA'S SOLE MILITARY, NAVAL AND AIR FORCE, THE NATIONAL GUARD WHOSE STRENGTH COMPORISES ONLY 1.3 PER CENT OF THE MALE - WORKING FORCE, -- IS ALSO ITS SOLE POLICE AND INTERNAL
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SECURITY FORCE (THE ONE EXCEPTION TO THIS IS THE CIVILIAN

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NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATION--DENI--WHICH CONSISTS
OF ONLY ABOUT 200 MEN). IT IS FREQUENTLY COMMITTED
TO SUPPLYING LAND, SEA OR AIR TRANSPORTATION
OF CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
ACTIVITIES. A SUBSTANTIAL PART OF ITS MANPOWER IS
DEVOTED TO SERVING AS A CONSTABULARY IN THE COUNTRY'S
RURAL AREAS; IN ADDITION, IT INCLUDES THE UNIFORMED
AND PLAINCLOTHES POLICE IN THE NATION'S
MAJOR CITIES. ITS ORGANIZED MILITARY LAND
STRENGTH IS SIX RIFLE COMPANIES, ONE RANGER COMPANY
AND A HORSE CAVALRY COMPANY. AS A ROUGH COMPARISON,
IT WOULD BE AS IF, IN A COUNTRY THE SIZE OF
THE UNITED STATES, THE TOTAL MANPOWER OF THE ARMED
FORCES, INCLUDING THE COAST GUARD, THE FEDERAL
INTELLIGENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT FORCES, ALL UNIFORMED
AND PLAINCLOTHES STATE AND LOCAL POLICE FORCES,
AND A NUMBER OF CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AT ALL
LEVELS, TOTALLED ONLY AROUND ONE MILLION MEN.
IN POINT OF FACT, OUR ARMY ALONE EXCEEDS THIS FIGURE.

3. Q. WE HAVE HEARD THAT THE UNITED STATES IS
SUPPORTING AND FUNDING THE NATIONAL GUARD. IS THIS
TRUE?

A. FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, THE UNITED STATES
HAS PROVIDED ASSISTANCE, IN THE FORM OF BOTH
GRANT AID AND CREDIT MILITARY SALES, TO THE GOVERNMENT
OF PANAMA, AS WE HAVE TO OTHER FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS
IN THE HEMISPHERE AND AROUND THE WORLD. THE BULK
OF THIS ASSISTANCE IN RECENTY YEARS HAS BEEN IN THE FORM
OF TRAINING. IN THE 13-YEAR PERIOD FOR FISCAL YEARS
1963 THROUGH 1975, THE UNITED STATES HAS PROVIDED
MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO PANAMA IN THE AMOUNTS OF
$3,536,871 IN MATERIAL AND $2,619,579 IN TRAINING,
FOR A TOTAL OF $6,156,440. DURING FISCAL YEAR 1975,
A TOTAL OF $570,914 WAS PROVIDED, OF WHICH $241,414
WAS IN MATERIAL AND $329,500 IN THE FORM OF TRAINING.
THE UNITED STATES IS NOT PROVIDING ANY DIRECT
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TOWARD MEETING THE ORDINARY
OPERATIONAL EXPENSES OF THE NATIONAL GUARD,
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PARTICULARLY INCLUDING ITS PAYROLL. IN RECENT YEARS,
THE NATIONAL GUARD'S PLANS FOR MAJOR EQUIPMENT OR
WEAPONS PURCHASES ABROAD (PRIMARILY IN IN THE UNITED
STATES), HAVE INCREASINGLY CALLED FOR STRAIGHT
PURCHASE ON NORMAL COMMERICAL TERMS FOR MANY ITEMS.

4. Q. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT CUBA IS PROVIDING
ARMS, TRAINING AND ASSISTANCE TO THE NATIONAL GUARD,

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AND THAT IT IS SEEKING TO INDOCTRINATE THE GUARD'S
MEMBERS WITH ANTI-AMERICAN IDEAS. IS THIS TRUE?
IF SO, WHY ARE WE PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO
A FORCE WHICH IS APPARENTLY BEING PREPARED FOR USE
AGAINST US?

A. SO FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, THE NATIONAL GUARD
HAS NOT ACQUIRED ANY WEAPONS FROM CUBA, AND WE KNOW
OF NO PLANS FOR IT TO DO SO. THE UNITED STATES
HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN THE PRINCIPAL SUPPLIER OF
ARMS AND TRAINING FOR THE NATIONAL GUARD, AND IT IS
OUR POLICY TO RETAIN THIS ROLE THROUGH THE
DEVELOPMENT OF A HARMONIOUS, COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP
WITH THAT FORCE.

WE HAVE SEEN NO EVIDENCE THAT THE GUARD, AS AN INSTI-
TUTION, HAS OR IS SEEKING TO ACQUIRE A CONSCIOUSLY
ANTI-AMERICAN ORIENTATION. LIKE MANY OTHER PANAMANIAN
INSTITUTIONS, THE NATIONAL GUARD WISHES TO BE REGARDED
AS A SEPARATE INDIVIDUALITY, NOT AS AN ARM OF THE
UNITED STATES MILITARY. WE DO NOT, HOWEVER, CONSIDER
PANAMANIAN NATIONALISM--WHICH IS QUITE
PREVALENT WITHIN THE GUARD--AS EQUIVALENT
TO ANTI-AMERICANISM. THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL
GUARD ALSO SHARE THE GENERAL PANAMANIAN ASPIRATION
FOR A NEW CANAL TREATY AND A NEW AND MORE MATURE
AND BALANCED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES.
AS FOR THIS, MANY PANAMANIANS HAVE OBSERVED TO US
THAT IT IS THE FRIENDS OF THE UNITED STATES, NOT
ITS ENEMIES, IN PANAMA WHO MOST ARDENTLY SEEK A
NEW TREATY TO REMOVE THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT
BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

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THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR ASSISTANCE TO THE GUARD IS TO AID IN PREPARING IT TO ASSUME AN EXPANDED ROLE IN THE DEFENSE OF THE CANAL THROUGH COMBINED TRAINING WITH US MILITARY FORCES IN THE CANAL ZONE AND CONTIUED TRAINING IN BOTH UNITED STATES AND CANAL ZONE MILITARY TRAINING FACILITIES, AND TO SUPPORT MODERNAIZATION, SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND RETENTION OF US MILITARY INFLUENCE BY PROVIDING MODEST PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING. WE HAVE EVERY EXPECTATION THAT A MATURE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NATIONAL GUARD IS BOTH POSSIBLE AND ATTAINABLE, AND IT IS OUR POLICY TO SEEK TO BUILD THIS TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF NEW CANAL TREATY. WE EXPECT THAT THE NATIONAL GUARD, AS AN INSTITUTION, WILL BE RECEPTIVE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH A RELATIONSHIP WITH US.

5. Q. HOW GREAT IS NATIONAL GUARD PARTICIPATION IN PANAMA'S GOVERNMENT? IS IT NOT A MILITARY GOVERNMENT?

A. NO, GENERALLY SPEAKING, IT IS NOT, AS WE HAVE BECOME USED TO THE TERM IN LATIN AMERICA. THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMANDER OF THE GUARD, GENERAL TORRIJOS, IS OF COURSE CONCURRENTLY THE CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT. ONE MEMBER OF THE GUARD'S GENERAL STAFF, LTC RUBEN D. PAREDES, SERVES CONCURRRENTLY AS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT. A FEW INDIVIDUAL OFFICERS IN THE GUARD HOLD POSTS IN THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AT LOWER LEVELS. HOWEVER, THE GUARD AS A WHOLE DOES NOT HAVE, AND DOES NOT APPEAR TO WANT, A COMMAANDING DIRECT VOICE IN THE DAY TO DAY RUNNING OF THE GOVERNMENT. RATHER, IT APPEARS TO SERVE AS AN INSTITUTIONAL AUDITOR OF THE AFFAIRS OF THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT AT ALL LEVELS, RESPONSIBLE DIRECTLY TO THE CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT. IN THIS CAPACITY, THE NATIONAL GUARD AS AN INSTITUTION CAN AND DOES EXERCISE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CONTROL, AND AN ULTIMATE VETO, OVER CIVIL OFFICIALS. BUT IT DOES NOT EXERCISE THEIR FUNCTIONS.

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6. Q. ARE THERE PLANS FOR SUBSTANTIAL EXPANSION
OF THE NATIONAL GUARD?

A. THE 8-POINT STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES
SIGNED BY SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER AND PANAMANIAN
FOREIGN MINISTER TACK IN 1974 ENVISAGED THAT PANAMA
WOULD IN THE FUTURE, UNDER A NEW TREATY, PARTICIPATE
IN THE DEFENSE OF THE CANAL JOINTLY WITH THE UNITED
STATES. ITS DOING SO WILL INEVITABLY REQUIRE
AN EXPANSION OF ITS CURRENT STRENGTH AND
CAPABILITIES, WHICH ARE NOW, AS MENTIONED ABOVE,
LARGELY LIMITED TO RURAL CONSTABULARY, CIVIL
DEVELOPMENT AND POLICE DUTIES. THE UNITED STATES
MILITARY GROUP ATTACHED TO THE EMBASSY IN PANAMA
IS CONSULTING WITH THE NATIONAL GUARD ABOUT SUCH POSSIBLE
EXPANSION, AND ABOUT THE ROLE WHICH THE UNITED
STATES PLAY IN IT. IT IS IMPORTANT TO US THAT
THIS BE DONE, FOR SEVERAL REASONS. FIRST, THE BEST
DEFENSE OF THE CANAL IS A DEFENSE WHICH INCLUDES
THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF PANAMA. SECOND, WE SEE
NO REASON WHY, AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME IN THE FUTURE
WHEN CAPABILITIES AND FORCES OF THE NATIONAL
GUARD HAVE DEVELOPED ADQUATELY, THE NATIONAL
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GUARD COULD NOT PARTIALLY RELIEVE SOME OF THE US
MILITARY FORCES CURRENTLY COMMITTED TO THE
DEFENSE OF THE CANAL. THUS, IT IS CLEARLY IN
OUR INTEREST TO SEE THAT THE GUARD IS ARMED AND
TRAINED TO DO THIS ADEQUATELY WHEN THETIME
ARRIVES FOR IT TO DO SO.

7. POSSIBLE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANSWERS RELATING
TO INCOMPETENCE WHICH SOME ALLEGE IS PREVALENT
IN THE NATIONAL GUARD ARE CONTAINED IN MESSAGE
NUMBER 3 OF THIS SERIES.
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